

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## Times set for public to meet final 4 (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — The general public, parents and employees can meet with the four finalists for the Little Rock School District superintendent job when each visits Little Rock for School Board interviews.

Each finalist will be available to meet the public from 12:30-1:30 p.m. on the day of his interview. The “meet and greet” sessions will be in the district’s administration building at 810 W. Markham St.

The P TA Advisory Council and parents, in general, may choose to meet with the finalists between 4-5 p.m., also in the administration building.

The 5-6 p.m. time slot has been set aside for district employees to meet with the finalists.

Connie Hathorn, superintendent of Youngstown, Ohio, schools will be in Little Rock on Monday.

Stefanie Phillips, former deputy superintendent of the Clayton County, Ga., schools will be in town Tuesday.

Dexter Suggs Sr., chief of staff in Indianapolis public schools, will be interviewed Wednesday, and Walter Milton Jr., superintendent of Springfield, Ill., schools will be interviewed March 4.

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## Education roots run deep, Hathorn says (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — Connie Hathorn, a longtime educational administrator with degrees from two Arkansas universities, said he believes his diverse roles in leading schools and districts have given him the experience he needs to take the reins of the Little Rock School District.

Hathorn, 61, who taught and coached in Watson Chapel and Pine Bluff schools before leaving the state in 1989, is one of four candidates who will interview with the Little Rock School Board starting this week to replace Superintendent Morris Holmes, 73, whose contract expires June 30.

“Education is my passion, community is my strength, and Arkansas is where my heart lives,” Hathorn wrote in his application for the position.

The superintendent of the 5,600-student Youngstown City School District in Ohio since 2010, Hathorn previously worked in the 24,000-student Akron City School District for 19 years. There he served at various points as executive director of school improvement, executive director of student services and - most recently - as the executive director of human resources.

Hathorn also has worked as a principal in Darlington County, S.C.

Experiences dealing with difficult financial situations, improving academically struggling schools, negotiating with teacher unions and confronting enrollment loss have prepared him for the challenges he might face in the 25,000-student Little Rock School District, Hathorn said in an interview.

"I have all of that background in the urban school system, and I can bring that with me," he said. "I believe the Little Rock school system can go to the next level."

The McPherson & Jacobson search firm, receiving \$21,500 plus expenses, used the School Board's criteria to find candidates for the position. Among other things, the criteria called for an "ethical and courageous leader," an "analytical academician who implements best practices instudent achievement," and "an excellent communicator who can build consensus throughout the community."

Hathorn pointed to his experiences in Youngstown as the most recent example of how he fits the criteria.

When that district hired him in 2010, the state had classified it in "academic emergency" for two years. Under that classification, given to districts that fail to meet student achievement benchmarks, the district was under additional monitoring by a special state commission.

The district also had been declared in "fiscal emergency" by the state twice for financial management issues.

Hathorn addressed the issues, raised student test scores and led the district out of academic emergency by meeting with administrators, teachers, parents and community groups to help develop a 100-day plan. He aligned curriculum with state standards and set up new professional development opportunities for teachers so they could learn from one another, he said.

"The teaching profession is the most isolated profession," Hathorn said. "Once you close that door, you're there by yourself."

Also, teachers began administering assessments every three weeks so they could determine whether students were learning the content or if they needed to revisit certain lessons, Hathorn said.

Youngstown schools, with a \$105 million annual budget, still face financial problems, including a deficit that is projected to grow to \$48 million within five years if the district doesn't make further cuts.

The district faced some criticism when it opted to construct a \$3.7 million football stadium, despite having financial problems. But Hathorn defended the decision, noting that the money used on the stadium was leftover funds earmarked in a millage election for facilities projects.

Some of the district's financial problems have been spurred by dropping enrollment. Hathorn said he has worked to combat that decline by securing private donations and grants to develop special schools that focus on science and performing arts, and to offer \$3,000 scholarships to all of the district's graduates.

"I do believe in choices," Hathorn said. "I think a parent deserves the right to have their children in the best school possible. What we have to do is we have to be better than our competitors."

William Siegfert, the former president of the Akron Education Association, the Akron teacher's union, called Hathorn "a fair, compassionate individual who really cares about teachers."

"I hated to see Connie Hathorn leave this district," he said. "In my 27-year tenure as president, I probably worked with eight to 10 directors of human resources. He was one of the finest."

Hathorn started his job as human resources director after a contentious time in the district, when failed negotiations led the union to strike, Siegferth said.

In his time, Hathorn helped negotiate six teacher contracts, settling all issues without threats of strikes or impasse, Siegferth said.

Hathorn has a bachelor's degree in health and physical education from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, a master's in educational administration from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and a doctorate in educational administration from Iowa State University.

He has a wife, Michelle, and two adult sons.

The board has not publicly set a salary for the new superintendent. Holmes' annual salary is \$215,000.

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### **LR district primed to excel, Milton says (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — Walter Milton Jr., a superintendent in three school districts over the course of 10 years, said he is eager to take his record of success in raising student achievement and establishing innovative programs to the Little Rock School District.

"It's a place where I can make a deep and lasting impact," the superintendent of the 15,100-student Springfield, Ill., public school system, said last week about Little Rock.

"I think a district like Little Rock is ripe," he said. "With the right leadership - with someone who is vested into the community and someone who has a track record of increasing student achievement - the district can do major things."

Milton, 46, is one of four finalists selected for interviews in the coming days by the Little Rock School Board for the position held by Superintendent Morris Holmes, 73. His contract as head of the 25,000-student school system with a \$340 million budget expires June. 30. He is paid \$215,000.

Of the four, Milton has the most superintendent experience - six years in Springfield and two years each in Flint, Mich., and the smaller 1,300-student Fallsburg Central School District in New York, near his boyhood home of Rochester.

But with Milton's superintendent experience also comes contention, including some centered on his personnel decisions and audit findings.

Last week, Milton publicly confirmed that he and the Springfield School Board had privately agreed to his leaving that district March 31 at a cost to the district of nearly \$178,000. That separation agreement came in the wake of Milton asking the board last fall for an extension on his contract that was to expire in 2014. The board declined. In Springfield, Milton oversees a racially diverse school system with a growing enrollment in a capital city. The district operates under a desegregation court order. It engages in collective bargaining for teacher contracts.

The Springfield system includes a magnet school, a charter school, an elementary-middle school that features the International Baccalaureate program and a middle school that features separate instruction for boys and girls.

Two of the district schools have received the national Blue Ribbon Award for excellence. There is a movement toward a 1-to-1 ratio of technology devices to students.

"I'm very, very proud of this district," Milton said. "I have no angst. I have no regrets. I feel really good about my experience. I came and did what I think every superintendent should do in a district."

A check of education achievement statistics posted by the state of Illinois shows that there were gains in the percentages of Springfield students meeting or exceeding Illinois Learning Standards between 2006-07, the year before Milton's arrival, and last year.

In 2007, 63.9 percent of Springfield students met or exceeded learning standards on state exams. Statewide, that percentage was 73.8. In both 2011 and 2012, the Springfield percentage was 67.6 percent. Statewide, 76.7 percent of students met or exceeded the standards in 2012.

Milton cited fundamental policy differences with the Springfield board as a reason for his nearing exit. Those differences included the recent decision by the Springfield School Board to close the 3-year-old Capital College Preparatory Academy to cut expenses in a district that faces millions of dollars in state and local funding cuts.

The academy, one of Milton's innovations that he says is showing strong results, features separate classes for middle-school girls and boys, strict dress and discipline codes, and an interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasizes math, science and technology.

Chris Colgren, principal of the 300-pupil academy, called Milton a personable visionary leader and said the academy that targets low-income families exemplifies that.

"He was charged when he came to Springfield with the responsibility of closing the achievement gap," Colgren said. "A lot of people throughout this nation talk a lot about closing the achievement gap but very few put forward solutions. He came in with this very practical solution."

Dan Ford, president of the Springfield Education Association, which is the teachers' union, said Milton meets monthly with teacher leaders and listens to what they say, although he doesn't always agree with them. Teachers received raises of 2 percent and 1.5 percent in the past two years, he said.

Ford said Milton is a creative superintendent.

"He cares about kids. I really do believe that," Ford said. "I believe he's a big-picture person. If I say he has a fault, it's maybe choosing the right people underneath to get to that big picture."

Milton's work history has raised questions about an associate he enlisted in two of his districts who was later revealed to be accused of molesting a child, and a financial audit of superintendent expenditures in Fallsburg.

Milton said he didn't know the man had been accused until it was revealed in a school district background check. Some news reports indicate that the man was convicted of the charge, but Milton sent to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette a Fulton County, Ga., Superior Court document indicating that the man was acquitted of a molestation charge in October 2008.

Milton also forwarded an April 2012 letter from a Pittsford, N.Y., attorney to Milton saying that an “amicable settlement” was reached in disputes and counter-disputes over a financial audit between Milton and Fallsburg, and “in our opinion, there is not substantiated wrong doing ... engaged in by you.”

More recently, the Springfield district hired a teacher last fall who did not meet required qualifications and was accused of having a sexual relationship with two students. A county regional education office is doing a districtwide check of all teacher certifications as a result.

“People run away with the negative,” Milton said about the reports that have come to the attention of social media outlets and news organizations in Little Rock.

At least partly as a result of those reports, there is a Facebook-posted petition asking the Little Rock School Board to remove Milton as a finalist and to sever its relationship with the McPherson & Jacobson superintendent search firm that recommended Milton.

“If any of those had been true, I wouldn’t be here in Springfield,” Milton said of the reports. “My district here, when they vetted me, they did a real thorough job. I think you have a small group of people, for whatever reason, they have issues and they want to keep it going. Negativity excites people.”

Milton said he is familiar with central Arkansas because his company, From the Heart International Educational Services, does work in the state.

A spokesman for the Pulaski County Special School District said Milton’s company has four contracts, three of which are \$24,500 each for work at Sylvan Hills and Jacksonville high schools - and for developing and analyzing a survey of black students in the district. The terms of the school contracts call for 2.5 hours of service per day for 10 days in each of the schools. The contract for work at Harris Elementary is for \$16,500.

“I can tell you that his sessions have been phenomenal,” Jacksonville High School Principal Henry Anderson said in an e-mail to the district about Milton’s work.

Milton’s interest in moving to Arkansas and to the South is partly personal - a desire to be closer to a sister in northern Louisiana.

Milton is married to Lisa Petros and is the father of three sons, a daughter and a foster son.

He has a bachelor’s degree in history from the State University of New York at Albany, a master’s degree in history from State University of New York College at Brockport, and a doctorate in education leadership earned in 2006 from the University at Buffalo.

He started his teaching and coaching career in the Brighton Central School District in New York in 1993 and was a principal in Rochester from 1996-2003.

Milton said his goals for the Little Rock School District and its students are many.

“If given the opportunity to lead Little Rock, I would work tirelessly to make sure the district becomes a national model with students who are globally competent. I want students who are critical and analytical thinkers.

“I not only want to close the achievement gap but to increase the opportunities. I want to introduce students to the whole world of tier I and tier II colleges and universities, and to have schools that are really designed to fit all

the different needs of all the different learners. I want to make things like suspensions and expulsions and aberrant behavior all part of the past. I think that can be accomplished.”